

Government responds to media enquiries about virus testing

On reports that three taxi drivers and a rehab bus driver that were confirmed cases of COVID-19 earlier were subsequently tested negative after being followed up by the Hospital Authority and have been discharged from the hospital, a government spokesman today (November 21) responded as follows:

The four cases were preliminarily confirmed by the private laboratory responsible for the Targeted Group Testing Scheme (TGTS) arranged by the Transport Department as one positive and three "indeterminate". They were sent to the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Department of Health (DH) for confirmatory test according to established procedures and subsequently confirmed as four positive cases. The test results at that time showed that the viral load of the specimens was very low. These cases were later tested negative for the virus and met the discharge criteria hence were arranged to be discharged. This does not affect the confirmation as positive cases earlier.

The private laboratory responsible for the related TGTS is KingMed Diagnostics (Hong Kong) Limited. This laboratory has participated with satisfactory performance in the external quality assurance programme of the DH, and has the medical testing accreditation of the Hong Kong Laboratory Accreditation Scheme (HOKLAS). The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch of the Centre for Health Protection of the DH has been designated by the World Health Organization (WHO) this year as the WHO COVID-19 Reference Lab and WHO COVID-19 external quality assessment programme provider. The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch also provides a quality assessment programme for local laboratories.

Taking into account that multiple cases were tested positive at the same time, the Public Health Laboratory Services Branch has earlier conducted follow-up investigations, including obtaining relevant information, visiting the laboratory and reviewing their sample handling and testing procedures. The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch has so far found no definite evidence that cross-contamination of specimens occurred during the process. The Public Health Laboratory Services Branch has also provided some suggestions to the private laboratory in accordance with good laboratory practice. The Government will continue to follow up and closely monitor the quality of service provided by the laboratory to the Government so as to ensure its service quality.